



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

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TESTING REVEALS NO TRACE OF WEST NILE VIRUS IN CALIFORNIA

Local health officials are prepared for disease, which affects small percent of population

The West Nile virus is not present in California or San Diego County, say local health officials. The virus has been moving west since its discovery in the New York area in 1999.

"Experts don't know exactly when it will get here," says Nancy Bowen, acting San Diego County Public Health Officer. "But it is estimated that it will show up in the next couple of years."

The mosquito-borne virus travels long distances via birds, including crows and ravens, which die from the virus, Bowen said. Mosquitoes bite the infected birds and can transmit the virus when they bite humans.

The virus sickens less than 1 percent of those who are bitten by an infected mosquito. Only about one in 150 infected people exhibit severe symptoms, and those who do are usually elderly or have weakened immune systems. Not all mosquitoes that bite infected birds will transmit the disease, Bowen said.

The public can help reduce the risk of mosquito-borne diseases like West Nile by locating and eliminating sources of standing water that can support mosquito breeding.

"Look for standing water in flower pots, tires, boats or other sources," says Patricia Cawthon, acting chief of the County Department of Environmental Health's Vector Surveillance and Control program. "Keep swimming pools clean, wash out pet dishes regularly, change water in horse troughs and bird baths weekly, watch for leaks in irrigation systems and don't over-water lawns."

Vector Control crews can treat water when mosquito breeding is found. Mosquito-eating fish also are available from Vector Control for backyard ponds, Cawthon said.

Community Health asks the public to call when they come across a bird that has been dead for 24 hours or less. To report all dead birds, call Vector Surveillance and Control at (619) 694-2888.